

My Recollections of December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor on the Oklahoma

By Jesse Kalman

My name is Jesse Kalman and I was aboard the Oklahoma on December 7, 1941. At that time, I was a ship's cook, 3rd class. I had been ashore to see a friend at Schofield on the 6th; I got back to the Okie about midnight, turned in and got up at 4:00 am and went to work in the butcher shop (02 level). Archie West, SC 2/c, and I were working there; we finished up and were cleaning up the shop (by the way, we were supposed to have steak for dinner than night). I went out on topside to get rid of some trash and looked toward Merry's Point and saw what I believe was the first torpedo launched toward us and saw a "Jap meatball" on the plane wing. I hollered to Archie, "Let's haul ass – a fish is about to hit us".

GQ had not sounded yet but I went to my battle station on the 2nd deck (ammo supply). By that time, 2 or 3 more "fish" had hit us. We were listing about 15 degrees – the decks were slick from fuel oil. Shortly after that, a 3rd/c shipfitter came through and told us the "abandon ship" had been passed – the speakers were out.

We headed for topside and some of us tried to break loose a nest of life rafts off Turett #4, but we got them hung up and couldn't get them overboard. By this time, the ship was listing about 45 degrees. I saw a bundle of life jackets floating near the ship, so I jumped in and dog paddled over to them (I'm still a non-swimmer). A motor launch came by and took us to the sub-base piers (while en route, the Arizona blew up).

At the sub-base, the lucky bag was opened and we got some clothes to wear. Later that day, we saw some of our planes coming in – that gave us a scare – we thought the "Japs" were coming back. Monday, a group of Okie sailors were given a pep talk by E. J. Foy, our ex-skipper.

I was eventually assigned to the galley on Ford Island and worked there until I was transferred to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel after the Navy took it over as a rest and recuperation annex for sub sailors. While there, I made 2nd and 1st class.

In November of 1943, I was sent to commissary school in San Diego. I made chief in April of 1944. I retired from the Navy in January of 1960.

The only unique thing that happened to me was that I was at Pearl Harbor when the war started and in Tokyo Bay the day it ended.

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